
Title: The Velveteen Rabbit

Author: Easter Bunny [UWF]

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THERE was once a
velveteen rabbit, and in
the beginning he was
really splendid. He was
fat and bunchy, as a
rabbit should be; his coat
was spotted brown and
white, he had real thread
whiskers, and his ears
were lined with pink
sateen. On Christmas
morning, when he sat
wedged in the top of the
Boy's stocking, with a
sprig of holly between his
paws, the effect was
charming. There were other
things in the stocking,
nuts and oranges and a
toy engine, and chocolate
almonds and a clockwork
mouse, but the Rabbit
was quite the best of all.
For at least two hours
the Boy loved him, and
then Aunts and Uncles
came to dinner, and there
was a great rustling of
tissue paper and
unwrapping of parcels, and
in the excitement of
looking at all the new
presents the Velveteen
Rabbit was forgotten. For
a long time he lived in
the toy cupboard or on
the nursery floor, and no
one thought very much
about him. He was
naturally shy, and being
only made of velveteen,
some of the more
expensive toys quite

snubbed him. The mechanical toys were very superior, and looked down upon every one else; they were full of modern ideas, and pretended they were real. The model boat, who had lived through two seasons and lost most of his paint, caught the tone from them and never missed an opportunity of referring to his rigging in technical terms. The Rabbit could not claim to be a model of anything, for he didn't know that real rabbits existed; he thought they were all stuffed with sawdust like himself, and he understood that sawdust was quite out-of-date and should never be mentioned in modern circles. Even Timothy, the jointed wooden lion, who was made by the disabled soldiers, and should have had broader views, put on airs and pretended he was connected with Government. Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very insignificant and commonplace, and the only person who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse. The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that

they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it. "What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?" "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real." "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit. "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt." "Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are real?"
said the Rabbit. And then
he wished he had not said
it, for he thought the
Skin Horse might be
sensitive. But the Skin
Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me
Real," he said. "That was
a great many years ago;
but once you are Real
you can't become unreal
again. It lasts for
always."

The Rabbit sighed. He
thought it would be a
long time before this
magic called Real happened
to him. He longed to
become Real, to know
what it felt like; and yet
the idea of growing
shabby and losing his eyes
and whiskers was rather
sad. He wished that he
could become it without
these uncomfortable
things happening to him.

There was a person called
Nana who ruled the
nursery. Sometimes she
took no notice of the
playthings lying about, and
sometimes, for no reason
whatever, she went
swooping about like a
great wind and hustled
them away in cupboards.
She called this "tidying
up," and the playthings all
hated it, especially the
tin ones. The Rabbit
didn't mind it so much,
for wherever he was
thrown he came down
soft.

One evening, when the
Boy was going to bed, he
couldn't find the china
dog that always slept
with him. Nana was in a
hurry, and it was too
much trouble to hunt for

china dogs at bedtime, so she simply looked about her, and seeing that the toy cupboard door stood open, she made a swoop.

"Here," she said, "take your old Bunny! He'll do to sleep with you!" And she dragged the Rabbit out by one ear, and put him into the Boy's arms.

That night, and for many nights after, the Velveteen Rabbit slept in the Boy's bed. At first he found it rather uncomfortable, for the Boy hugged him very tight, and sometimes he rolled over on him, and sometimes he pushed him so far under the pillow that the Rabbit could scarcely breathe. And he missed, too, those long moonlight hours in the nursery, when all the house was silent, and his talks with the Skin Horse. But very soon he grew to like it, for the Boy used to talk to him, and made nice tunnels for him under the bedclothes that he said were like the burrows the real rabbits lived in. And they had splendid games together, in whispers, when Nana had gone away to her supper and left the night-light burning on the mantelpiece. And when the Boy dropped off to sleep, the Rabbit would snuggle down close under his little warm chin and dream, with the Boy's hands clasped close round him all night long.

And so time went on, and the little Rabbit was very happy—so happy that he never noticed how his beautiful velveteen fur

was getting shabbier and shabbier, and his tail becoming unsewn, and all the pink rubbed off his nose where the Boy had kissed him.

Spring came, and they had long days in the garden, for wherever the Boy went the Rabbit went too. He had rides in the wheelbarrow, and picnics on the grass, and lovely fairy huts built for him under the raspberry canes behind the flower border. And once, when the Boy was called away suddenly to go out to tea, the Rabbit was left out on the lawn until long after dusk, and Nana had to come and look for him with the candle because the Boy couldn't go to sleep unless he was there. He was wet through with the dew and quite earthy from diving into the burrows the Boy had made for him in the flower bed, and Nana grumbled as she rubbed him off with a corner of her apron.

"You must have your old Bunny!" she said. "Fancy all that fuss for a toy!"

The Boy sat up in bed and stretched out his hands.

"Give me my Bunny!" he said. "You mustn't say that. He isn't a toy. He's REAL!"

When the little Rabbit heard that he was happy, for he knew that what the Skin Horse had said was true at last. The nursery magic had happened to him, and he was a toy no longer. He

was Real. The Boy himself
had said it.

That night he was almost
too happy to sleep, and
so much love stirred in
his little sawdust heart
that it almost burst. And
into his boot-button eyes,
that had long ago lost
their polish, there came a
look of wisdom and
beauty, so that even
Nana noticed it next
morning when she picked
him up, and said, "I
declare if that old Bunny
hasn't got quite a
knowing expression!"
That was a wonderful
Summer!

Near the house where
they lived there was a
wood, and in the long
June evenings the Boy
liked to go there after
tea to play. He took the
Velveteen Rabbit with him,
and before he wandered
off to pick flowers, or
play at brigands among
the trees, he always
made the Rabbit a little
nest somewhere among
the bracken, where he
would be quite cosy, for
he was a kind-hearted
little boy and he liked
Bunny to be comfortable.
One evening, while the
Rabbit was lying there
alone, watching the ants
that ran to and fro
between his velvet paws
in the grass, he saw two
strange beings creep out
of the tall bracken near
him.

They were rabbits like
himself, but quite furry
and brand-new. They must
have been very well made,
for their seams didn't
show at all, and they
changed shape in a queer
way when they moved; one
minute they were long

and thin and the next
minute fat and bunched,
instead of always staying
the same like he did.
Their feet padded softly
on the ground, and they
crept quite close to him,
twitching their noses,
while the Rabbit stared
hard to see which side
the clockwork stuck out,
for he knew that people
who jump generally have
something to wind them
up. But he couldn't see
it. They were evidently a
new kind of rabbit
altogether.

They stared at him, and
the little Rabbit stared
back. And all the time
their noses twitched.

"Why don't you get up
and play with us?" one of
them asked.

"I don't feel like it," said
the Rabbit, for he didn't
want to explain that he
had no clockwork.

"Ho!" said the furry
rabbit. "It's as easy as
anything," And he gave a
big hop sideways and
stood on his hind legs.

"I don't believe you can!"
he said.

"I can!" said the little
Rabbit. "I can jump higher
than anything!" He meant
when the Boy threw him,
but of course he didn't
want to say so.

"Can you hop on your
hind legs?" asked the
furry rabbit.

That was a dreadful
question, for the
Velveteen Rabbit had no
hind legs at all! The back
of him was made all in

one piece, like a
pincushion. He sat still in
the bracken, and hoped
that the other rabbits
wouldn't notice.

"I don't want to!" he said
again.

But the wild rabbits have
very sharp eyes. And this
one stretched out his
neck and looked.

"He hasn't got any hind
legs!" he called out.

"Fancy a rabbit without
any hind legs!" And he
began to laugh.

"I have!" cried the little
Rabbit. "I have got hind
legs! I am sitting on
them!"

"Then stretch them out
and show me, like this!"
said the wild rabbit. And
he began to whirl round
and dance, till the little
Rabbit got quite dizzy.

"I don't like dancing," he
said. "I'd rather sit still!"

But all the while he was
longing to dance, for a
funny new tickly feeling
ran through him, and he
felt he would give
anything in the world to
be able to jump about
like these rabbits did.

The strange rabbit
stopped dancing, and came
quite close. He came so
close this time that his
long whiskers brushed the
Velveteen Rabbit's ear,
and then he wrinkled his
nose suddenly and
flattened his ears and
jumped backwards.

"He doesn't smell right!"
he exclaimed. "He isn't a
rabbit at all! He isn't

real!"

"I am Real!" said the little Rabbit. "I am Real! The Boy said so!" And he nearly began to cry.

Just then there was a sound of footsteps, and the Boy ran past near them, and with a stamp of feet and a flash of white tails the two strange rabbits disappeared.

"Come back and play with me!" called the little Rabbit. "Oh, do come back! I know I am Real!"

But there was no answer, only the little ants ran to and fro, and the bracken swayed gently where the two strangers had passed. The Velveteen Rabbit was all alone.

"Oh, dear!" he thought. "Why did they run away like that? Why couldn't they stop and talk to me?"

For a long time he lay very still, watching the bracken, and hoping that they would come back. But they never returned, and presently the sun sank lower and the little white moths fluttered out, and the Boy came and carried him home.

Weeks passed, and the little Rabbit grew very old and shabby, but the Boy loved him just as much. He loved him so hard that he loved all his whiskers off, and the pink lining to his ears turned grey, and his brown spots faded. He even began to lose his shape, and he scarcely

looked like a rabbit any more, except to the Boy. To him he was always beautiful, and that was all that the little Rabbit cared about. He didn't mind how he looked to other people, because the nursery magic had made him Real, and when you are Real shabbiness doesn't matter.

And then, one day, the Boy was ill.

His face grew very flushed, and he talked in his sleep, and his little body was so hot that it burned the Rabbit when he held him close. Strange people came and went in the nursery, and a light burned all night and through it all the little Velveteen Rabbit lay there, hidden from sight under the bedclothes, and he never stirred, for he was afraid that if they found him some one might take him away, and he knew that the Boy needed him.

It was a long weary time, for the Boy was too ill to play, and the little Rabbit found it rather dull with nothing to do all day long. But he snuggled down patiently, and looked forward to the time when the Boy should be well again, and they would go out in the garden amongst the flowers and the butterflies and play splendid games in the raspberry thicket like they used to. All sorts of delightful things he planned, and while the Boy lay half asleep he crept up close to the pillow and whispered them in his ear. And presently the

fever turned, and the Boy got better. He was able to sit up in bed and look at picture-books, while the little Rabbit cuddled close at his side. And one day, they let him get up and dress. It was a bright, sunny morning, and the windows stood wide open. They had carried the Boy out on to the balcony, wrapped in a shawl, and the little Rabbit lay tangled up among the bedclothes, thinking.

The Boy was going to the seaside to-morrow. Everything was arranged, and now it only remained to carry out the doctor's orders. They talked about it all, while the little Rabbit lay under the bedclothes, with just his head peeping out, and listened. The room was to be disinfected, and all the books and toys that the Boy had played with in bed must be burnt.

"Hurrah!" thought the little Rabbit. "To-morrow we shall go to the seaside!" For the boy had often talked of the seaside, and he wanted very much to see the big waves coming in, and the tiny crabs, and the sand castles.

Just then Nana caught sight of him.

"How about his old Bunny?" she asked.

"That?" said the doctor. "Why, it's a mass of scarlet fever germs!—Burn it at once. What? Nonsense! Get him a new one. He mustn't have that any more!"

And so the little Rabbit
was put into a sack with
the old picture-books and
a lot of rubbish, and
carried out to the end
of the garden behind the
fowl-house. That was a
fine place to make a
bonfire, only the gardener
was too busy just then
to attend to it. He had
the potatoes to dig and
the green peas to gather,
but next morning he
promised to come quite
early and burn the whole
lot.

That night the Boy slept
in a different bedroom,
and he had a new bunny
to sleep with him. It was
a splendid bunny, all white
plush with real glass
eyes, but the Boy was
too excited to care very
much about it. For
to-morrow he was going
to the seaside, and that
in itself was such a
wonderful thing that he
could think of nothing
else.

And while the Boy was
asleep, dreaming of the
seaside, the little Rabbit
lay among the old
picture-books in the
corner behind the
fowl-house, and he felt
very lonely. The sack had
been left untied, and so
by wriggling a bit he was
able to get his head
through the opening and
look out. He was shivering
a little, for he had
always been used to
sleeping in a proper bed,
and by this time his coat
had worn so thin and
threadbare from hugging
that it was no longer any
protection to him. Near
by he could see the
thicket of raspberry

canes, growing tall and
close like a tropical
jungle, in whose shadow
he had played with the
Boy on bygone mornings.
He thought of those long
sunlit hours in the
garden—how happy they
were—and a great
sadness came over him.
He seemed to see them
all pass before him, each
more beautiful than the
other, the fairy huts in
the flower-bed, the quiet
evenings in the wood when
he lay in the bracken and
the little ants ran over
his paws; the wonderful
day when he first knew
that he was Real. He
thought of the Skin
Horse, so wise and gentle,
and all that he had told
him. Of what use was it
to be loved and lose
one's beauty and become
Real if it all ended like
this? And a tear, a real
tear, trickled down his
little shabby velvet nose
and fell to the ground.

And then a strange thing
happened. For where the
tear had fallen a flower
grew out of the ground,
a mysterious flower, not
at all like any that grew
in the garden. It had
slender green leaves the
colour of emeralds, and in
the centre of the leaves
a blossom like a golden
cup. It was so beautiful
that the little Rabbit
forgot to cry, and just
lay there watching it. And
presently the blossom
opened, and out of it
there stepped a fairy.

She was quite the
loveliest fairy in the
whole world. Her dress
was of pearl and
dew-drops, and there
were flowers round her

neck and in her hair, and
her face was like the
most perfect flower of
all. And she came close
to the little Rabbit and
gathered him up in her
arms and kissed him on
his velveteen nose that
was all damp from crying.

"Little Rabbit," she said,
"don't you know who I
am?"

The Rabbit looked up at
her, and it seemed to
him that he had seen her
face before, but he
couldn't think where.

"I am the nursery magic
Fairy," she said. "I take
care of all the playthings
that the children have
loved. When they are old
and worn out and the
children don't need them
any more, then I come
and take them away with
me and turn them into
Real."

"Wasn't I Real before?"
asked the little Rabbit.

"You were Real to the
Boy," the Fairy said,
"because he loved you.
Now you shall be Real to
every one."

And she held the little
Rabbit close in her arms
and flew with him into
the wood.

It was light now, for the
moon had risen. All the
forest was beautiful, and
the fronds of the
bracken shone like frosted
silver. In the open glade
between the tree-trunks
the wild rabbits danced
with their shadows on the
velvet grass, but when
they saw the Fairy they
all stopped dancing and

stood round in a ring to
stare at her.

"I've brought you a new
playfellow," the Fairy said.
"You must be very kind
to him and teach him all
he needs to know in
Rabbit-land, for he is
going to live with you for
ever and ever!"

And she kissed the little
Rabbit again and put him
down on the grass.

"Run and play, little
Rabbit!" she said.

But the little Rabbit sat
quite still for a moment
and never moved. For
when he saw all the wild
rabbits dancing around him
he suddenly remembered
about his hind legs, and
he didn't want them to
see that he was made all
in one piece. He did not
know that when the Fairy
kissed him that last time
she had changed him
altogether. And he might
have sat there a long
time, too shy to move, if
just then something
hadn't tickled his nose,
and before he thought
what he was doing he
lifted his hind toe to
scratch it.

And he found that he
actually had hind legs!
Instead of dingy velveteen
he had brown fur, soft
and shiny, his ears
twitched by themselves,
and his whiskers were so
long that they brushed
the grass. He gave one
leap and the joy of using
those hind legs was so
great that he went
springing about the turf
on them, jumping sideways
and whirling round as the
others did, and he grew

so excited that when at
last he did stop to look
for the Fairy she had
gone.

He was a Real Rabbit at
last, at home with the
other rabbits.

Autumn passed and
Winter, and in the
Spring, when the days
grew warm and sunny, the
Boy went out to play in
the wood behind the
house. And while he was
playing, two rabbits crept
out from the bracken and
peeped at him. One of
them was brown all over,
but the other had
strange markings under
his fur, as though long
ago he had been spotted,
and the spots still
showed through. And
about his little soft nose
and his round black eyes
there was something
familiar, so that the Boy
thought to himself:

"Why, he looks just like
my old Bunny that was
lost when I had scarlet
fever!"

But he never knew that
it really was his own
Bunny, come back to look
at the child who had
first helped him to be
Real.